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Reconstruction Among the Small Nations of Middle Europe

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THE French Revolution gave birth to two political principles—the principle of nationality and the principle of democracy.

As long as the French revolutionary armies remained true to those two political principles, wherever they went throughout Europe they were received with acclaim and enthusiasm, but when they repudiated those two political principles they were rejected by the peoples of Europe. They did repudiate them when the Revolution fell under the control of Napoleon Bonaparte, and from a democratic revolution it was transformed into an autocratic imperialism. Bonaparte was destroyed because the peoples of Europe insisted upon the validity of the very principle to which the French Revolution had given birth, namely, the principle of nationality. It was the aroused national spirit of Spain, Germany, Russia and England that overthrew the greatest military autocrat of his day.

THE CONGRESS OF VIENNA

When the Congress of Vienna was held in 1815, one would have supposed that the statesmen and the kings, who had assembled there and who had called upon their peoples to rise against the foreign usurper, would have remembered the strength of the revolutionary principle and would have made their territorial readjustments conform to it. Unfortunately they did not. At that Congress two political principles fought for supremacy—the dynastic and the nationalistic—and the dynastic won out in every conflict. The territorial readjustments made then were made without any consideration of the principle of nationality. Peoples that were opposed to each other were united in one state, and peoples that formed one nation were divided among several states. The Dutch, who were Teutonic in origin, Protestant in religion and commercial in their economy, were compelled to form a single state with the Belgians who were Romance in race, Catho-

lic in faith and agrarian in their economy. In other words, two peoples that disliked each other were compelled to live in one state. On the other hand, Poles and Italians forming one nation were divided among several states. The result was that the history of Europe from the treaty of Vienna down to the present day has been the story of attempts on the part of the various peoples and nationalities to tear up that treaty and any other treaty that has since been made which did not conform to the principle of nationality.

THE CONGRESS OF BERLIN

In Western Europe by 1870 that principle had won out everywhere, and Western Europe, thereafter, was made up of national states. But although Western Europe by 1870 had realized the principle of nationality, that was not true of Eastern Europe. It would seem as if statesmen would never learn by experience. The Congress of Berlin of 1878, which assembled to readjust Eastern Europe after the Russo-Turkish war, paid as little attention and as little respect to the principle of nationality as those who had assembled at Vienna in 1815. No statesman had ever less reason to return to his capital and to speak of having brought back "peace with honor" than Disraeli, because few treaties of peace were more dishonorable than the peace of Berlin of 1878. The principle of nationality was violated in every respect. Bosnia and Herzegovina, inhabited exclusively by Serbs, was given over to Austria; Bessarabia, largely inhabited by Roumanians, was torn from Roumania and given to Russia; and Macedonia, inhabited by Bulgars, Serbs and Greeks, was given back to the mercy of the Turk. The result has been that since 1878 the determination of the peoples of Eastern and Southeastern Europe has been to tear up that treaty and to attempt to do what had been done in Western Europe—realize the principle of nationality. The first principle, therefore, upon which the reconstruction of Middle Europe must rest is that nationality must be the basis of territorial readjustment. It must be recognized that if on any great scale the people of one nation are placed within the borders of another nation, they will never rest content as long as there is a chance to break the peace and attain to national unity.

THE EVOLUTION OF SMALL STATES

You read in your history books that political evolution has been towards the formation of big states. That is not true. During the past century two great states of Europe have attained national unity—Germany and Italy. But, on the other hand, during that same period Belgium gained its independence in 1815, as did Serbia about the same time. Furthermore, in 1829 Greece became independent, followed, in 1856, by Roumania, and in 1878 by Bulgaria. Finally, in 1905, Norway, that had been united to Sweden by the treaty of Vienna, declared its independence. Now we have another group of small nations that have arisen in Central Europe—Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia. Political evolution has been really towards the development and the constitution of small nations, not large nations.

In 1914, Europe was organized politically as follows: In Western Europe there was a series of uni-national states, states made up of one nation. England, Spain, France, Germany, and Italy, are all one-nation states. Eastern Europe on the contrary was made up entirely of one great pluri-nation—the Russian Empire, including within its borders many nations. Right down through Middle Europe from Cape North in Lapland to Cape Mattapan at the end of Greece was a series of small nations and suppressed nationalities—Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, Finns, Poles, Bohemians, Hungarians, Serbs, Greeks and Bulgars. This Middle Europe, made up of these small nations, became the danger zone of Europe.

There are two reasons why this situation in Middle Europe endangered the peace of the world.

SUPPRESSION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONALITY

First because everywhere throughout that region the principle of nationality was violated. Poles and Finns in Russia were allowed no national rights and few rights of citizens. Poles in Germany were not privileged to speak their language in public; their newspapers were suppressed; they were not allowed to send their children to school where Polish was taught; they were not allowed to attend church where the service was in Polish; they were not allowed to form Polish unions to study Polish culture. All this was partly or wholly true of the Czechs in Austria, the

Slovaks in Hungary, and, of course, still more true of the suppressed peoples of the Ottoman Empire. Not only were there suppressed nationalities throughout Middle Europe, but nowhere did nationalities correspond with territorial boundaries. There were more Serbs outside of Serbia than inside of Serbia, and the Serbs outside of Serbia wanted to be inside of Serbia, and the Serbs inside of Serbia wanted them. Under the existing conditions they could not realize their nationality, but they were determined that sometime they would do so. That was the condition of unstable political equilibrium throughout the whole of Middle Europe. It was an invitation to war. Arbitration would not have settled it. You cannot arbitrate a condition where part of a nation outside of its boundaries want to be inside of them. The only settlement is to let them go inside.

AGGRESSION BY THE BIG NATIONS

The second reason why Middle Europe was the danger zone of Europe was that the very weakness of these small nations was an invitation to aggression. When the war broke out Sweden was pro-German. Why? Because she lived in fear and terror of Russia. Denmark was anti-German because she lived in fear and terror of Germany. Little Serbia was land-locked and without access to the sea and had practically but one market, Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary attempted to bring her to her knees over and over again by strangling her economically, by raising tariff duties on her products to such an extent that she would starve. The very weakness of these little nations was an invitation to aggression on the part of the big nations.

PROTECTION OF THE SMALL NATIONS

What is the second principle, therefore, for a sound reconstitution of Europe and of the world? It is to understand that in the new world reorganization or even in the new European reorganization, the majority of nations are going to be small nations and must be protected in their rights and in their needs. Now what are their rights and their needs? It would take a long time to go into a thorough discussion of them, but there are a few that are self-evident. Some of these nations of Middle Europe, like Czechoslovakia and Poland and Hungary are absolutely land-

locked. They have no seacoast. They have no access to the sea, and in this industrial era if there is not free access to the sea for a state it means the death of that state. How are they to get it? They cannot get it by their own might. Czechoslovakia, to take an illustration, is an industrial nation. It has made remarkable advances in the last generation industrially. It paid much beyond its proportionate share of the taxes of Austria before the war. It will starve if it cannot get the raw materials from beyond the seas that are necessary for its industries. Any nation will starve under those conditions. The electrical industries today contribute enormously to our necessities and conveniences and comforts. Electrical industries are dependent particularly upon two raw materials, rubber and copper. Rubber is localized in Central Africa and Central South America. Copper is localized in only a few places in the world and none in Czechoslovakia. If she is to continue her industrial life she must have the opportunity to bring freely from over the seas raw materials, and she must have free access to the coast to send her products across the seas to other countries. She must have the right to send those goods to the seaboard over railroads going through other countries, with the knowledge that she will not be charged preferential freight rates or be interfered with by tariff duties of any kind. Not only must these land-locked states of Middle Europe have access to the sea, but they must have the free use of ports. Any one who is familiar with the port rules knows how easy it is to put obstacles in the way of ships that are loading and unloading—to give preferences to the ships of one state over another. At Danzig, which is the outlet for Poland, and at Fiume, which is the outlet for the Jugoslavs, the Magyars and the Bohemians, there must exist what was agreed to at the end of the second Balkan War in regard to Saloniki. There part of the port itself was given over to the Serbs so that they could have their own docks and warehouses and also a spur of the railroad going down to those docks and warehouses. Their products then could be loaded upon the ships coming from abroad at those docks without interference on the part of any other people.

There are other needs of these people which I cannot take up now. I shall just touch on the third principle that is at the basis of a sound reconstruction of Middle Europe, namely, the political

principle of confederation. During the war the three Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, formed an informal kind of confederation which will probably continue for some time. If with that Scandinavian confederation in the North there were a Danubian confederation to the South there would probably be a greater feeling of security in Central Europe. If there were added to this a Balkan confederation reconstituted to be what it was in 1912, the prospects for continued peace in Southeastern Europe would be very much brighter than they ever have been in the past, and there is very little reason why this should not take place. Once the boundary lines are settled at Paris, and this abnormal period of turmoil and national resentment is over, in all probability, the peoples of the Balkans will settle down to the normal life that existed before the great war. The need of mutual help in the form of unions for tariff and other economic purposes will make itself so felt that in all probability a political confederation will follow.

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Nevertheless, although so much benefit would accrue to Middle Europe by the principle of confederation being realized, I do not believe that we can expect peace and stability and security to exist there without a greater confederation being formed—the League of Nations. The great states, the great powers, have been able always to command respect for their rights in the past. They have insisted upon them as inherent in their moral personality. Just as in municipal life, a man is equal before the law because he is a man, without reference to his being wealthy or intelligent, poor or ignorant, so today we shall expect under a league of nations that all nations, the little as well as the great, will have their moral personality observed. The realization of greater international coöperation is the only hope for the little nations, the small peoples, not only of Middle Europe, but of the earth.